"ONE, SIR? YES, SIR; RIGHT OVER HERE, SIR"

"The Endive Salad Is Very Nice To-day, Sir."

The Chef at Work Among His Recipes.

Why "the Endive Salad Is Very Nice To-day, Sir."

By ROBERT H. MOULTON

WHEN you have gone into a large restaurant or into one of the dining rooms of a large hotel, been directed to your seat by the head waiter, had your silver arranged by a bus boy, a menu handed you by your own waiter, and your order taken, have you ever known or imagined what went on "behind the scenes" after your order reached the kitchen? Do you know how many pounds of beef were on hand in case you happened to want an order of roast beef, or how many squab chickens were waiting in the refrigerator in case you decided you wanted fried chicken?

But perhaps we have gone a step too far. Let us go back, and "let's pretend" that you have not yet ordered your dinner. The waiter, one of the three hundred and fifty waiters that the hotel employs, whom you are expected to treat kindly and later on to tip generously, is standing back of you, a bit to one side. He hands you the menu. From relishes to coffee it has been especially prepared for you and for the others who might happen into the restaurant.

The day before, the steward planned the menu. The fact that he is a steward in a large restaurant and earns a salary of five figures means that he knows what people like to eat. He has statistics to show how many people will order each item on the menu. He knows which things his chefs are specialists in. He adds some dishes that are always good, such as Prime Ribs of Beef, and Spring Lamb. Then he adds special dishes, such as Braised Salmon, Dieppoise, or Breast of Duckling, Cumberland. These are for the man who is particular, who is looking for novelties.

Perhaps you do not know it, but every dish with a fancy name, unless it has been invented by the steward or chef of a particular hotel, and this is unusual, is the same all over. Puree of Mutton, Crowley, for example, is, or rather should be the same, whether orderd in London, New York, Denver, or Tokio. The epicure knows this. So does the steward. Therefore, in planning the menu, the steward must take into consideration the skill of his chefs. He must know their limitations as well as their specialties.

But that is not all in the preparation of a menu. The steward must know exactly what is in the pantries and refrigerators and storerooms. For if some guest proves especially hard to please and can find nothing that appeals to his or her appetite—and it is generally a woman who cannot find what she wants on a well-planned menu—there is a general menu that will be given to her, and this general menu lists hundreds of dishes. The well-stocked restaurant storeroom must contain materials to make any of these dishes of the general menu.

In planning the menu, the steward refers to a book of menus of other days. He finds that only twelve people ordered Whitefish in Jelly and that over fifty ordered Plum Tartlets. If both of these dishes appear on the menu for the day, the directions to the chef state that twelve orders of Whitefish in Jelly should be prepared but that Tartlets for fifty must be ready. That is why, in the restaurants of the better class, you are seldom told that a dish is "all out." For if, for an unexpected reason, more than twelve people believe that they'd like to try Whitefish in Jelly, by the time eight or nine have ordered, more whitefish is prepared for the extra orders.

Then the steward orders. He telephones to various wholesale houses. He is well known at all of them and receives a special price. He knows the conditions of the pantries and orders enough to last for two days; on Saturday he orders enough for three days. Usually, the steward sees that there are twenty-four large roasts in the refrigerators. There are five kinds of chickens that he must keep on hand. Roasting chickens weigh from three and a quarter to three and a half pounds, and there must be from seventy to 120 of these. Hens, which are used for chicken stock and soups, are purchased by weight, and there ought to be 500 pounds of hens. Then, too, there should be a good supply of broiling chickens, which weigh two and a half pounds, and a number of little squab chickens, very young ones, which tip the scales at one and a quarter pounds each—just right, tender, and substantial, too.

Steaks are not bought separately. They are purchased in the loin, and twenty-four loins, weighing about sixty pounds, is the right amount for safety. The hotel butchers cut these, as they are ordered, into sirloins or tenderloins.

Oysters are purchased by the barrel; good restaurants buy only oysters in the shell, opening them as they are ordered. Ten cases of eggs must be bought daily and about five tubs of creamery butter. Fish, more than any other dish, perhaps, varies as to location, and all hotels do not get the same kind. Some of the so-called "millionaire hotels," for example, always keep on hand twenty-five pounds of English sole. Other restaurants do not need English sole.

The supplies ordered, the steward reconstructs his menu. He takes off the things he could not procure and adds others that seem especially good. The menu is then sent to the printers.

So the next day it is handed to you by your waiter. You look it over carefully, not neglecting the right-hand side where the prices are listed. You order, let us say, Blue Points, Consomme Imperatrice, Fried Smelts, Sauce Catalane; Larded Filet of Beef, New Peas. Then you pause. You cannot decide on a salad. You appeal to your waiter. He is helpful. He has a suggestion.

"The French endive salad is very nice, sir."

You thank him and take French endive salad.

You order, then, some French pastry and coffee. The waiter disappears behind the scenes.

In the kitchen the waiter gives your order to the man waiting to receive it. The waiter is, perhaps, serving others, too, so, after giving your order, he goes out into the dining room again. Your Blue Point order is given to an oyster man. Perhaps the oysters have already been opened and are waiting, in an ice-covered tray. If so they are placed on a dish, with cracked ice. If not ready one of the three oyster men opens them for you. Your waiter is signalled. He gets them for you. There are five checkers who watch your waiter. They inspect your order. They inspect the oysters as they are taken to you, to see that you get the right food, served properly.

While you are eating the oysters one of the soup cooks is preparing your soup. There are from sixty to one hundred and fifty cooks in the average large restaurant. Of these about seven are soup cooks. The soup is not prepared especially for you, of course. It is nearly finished, all but the adding of special sauces. For, to tell the truth, although the menu may announce twelve or even fifteen kinds of soup, there are only about eight big kettles of soup in the hotel kitchen.

The fish cook, a fish frier this time, is preparing your smelts, and usually fried orders are prepared individually as ordered, for they would spoil if ready ahead of time. They are fried on a range sixty feet long, at which many of the other cooks are also engaged. In the range are ovens, but the broilers are separate.

Your fish passes inspection. It is served to you. Your filet of beef is not prepared individually, but is prepared by one of the expensive meat cooks, who are among the best paid of all the hotel cooks. With the meat your vegetables are served. But your vegetables have not been prepared by men; neither has your salad. Nine girls, all experts, prepare and cook the hot vegetables and arrange the salads. A man makes the salad dressings and the sauces for the vegetables.

Why was the waiter so thoughtful about the French endive? As you enter the kitchens you see a small blackboard. Above one side is written "Out of." Below this usually there is a blank space, for up-to-date restaurants are not "out of" many things. But on the other side is written "Recommend," and under this you will find several items, among them French endive salad. So your waiter was not being especially kind to you—he was just carrying out orders.

There are many reasons for "recommending" things. Sometimes it is that the steward has bought a large quantity of the food that is to be recommended to patrons, and wishes to have it used as soon as possible. Sometimes it means that, while still good, this especial food will not be so if kept until the next day. It may mean only that the dish is exceptionally good and that the steward wants his patrons to enjoy it. But when the waiter does recommend a dish to you he does not do it out of a heart bubbling over with good nature and helpfulness.

Your French pastry, brought to you on a tray with a dozen other pieces, perhaps, is checked twice, once when it leaves the kitchen and once when it is returned. This is so that you, or someone else, will be charged with the exact number of pieces taken. Your waiter is responsible for the tray of pastry until it has been returned to the kitchen.

The chef, his assistant, and the cooks are all proud of their work. Some have won individual fame and are known all over the hotel world for the dishes they have invented. One may be famous for the invention of many sauces, another for his wonderful confectionary. They spend days experimenting with new dishes.

You tip the waiter, though the tip is probably divided "three ways" after you leave, and your restaurant meal is over. But behind the scenes it was not the simple meal that it seemed as you ate to the accompaniment of an orchestra.

Checking the Order as It Leaves the Kitchen.

Just a Few of the Cooks.

Some of the Girls Who Prepare Salads.